

THE SOURCE AND SOUL FOR PROMOTING THE ARTS SINCE 1994



SEPTEMBER 2022

THE ARTFUL MIND



MICHAEL MARCUS AND TASJA KEETMAN

Photograph by Tasja Keetman



Photograph by Mike Edmonds

SASHA HALLOCK

CONTEMPORARY PAINTER

Interview by Harriet Candee Photographs Courtesy of the Artist

Sasha Hallock is a contemporary painter living and working in Brooklyn, NY. He creates small-scaled paintings with watercolor, graphite and colored pencil. Each piece is populated by geometric forms, vibrant hues and unexpected textures. By mounting the paper on wood panel, Hallock's work straddles two-dimensional art and sculptural objects. With an Iranian father and American mother, Hallock's paintings speak to a "bringing together," of disparate pieces to create an object of beauty. Each painting is the result of meticulous building: one line, shape and color in relationship to the next—an abstract language expressing themes of play, joy and faith. Sasha Hallock is represented by Susan Eley Fine Art.

Harriet Candee: Meeting you at your artist reception at SEFA Hudson last week brought me to the point of inspiration where I had to bring you into *The Artful Mind*, not any later than this September issue. I find your work beautiful and thought provoking. I chose a painting that I would, if I could, own myself, but it is sold, and that's a good thing! Can you tell us about, "Mercy" Small works no. 122?

Sasha Hallock: "Mercy" began with a focus on muted, dusty color and a delicate touch. I have a wonderful set of Agora opaque watercolors from Germany that come in shades of brown. They can be very soft and subtle compared to my Kurateke watercolors from Japan, which tend to be thicker, more oily and aggressive. And so, "Mercy" in

many ways started from this place of quiet thought, a calm after what seemed like a month of storms in my life. I was tired from all the preparation for the show in Hudson, finishing a graduate course and the summer heat in my Brooklyn studio. I wanted to rest in the painting, to build a place of refuge, protection and longing. And as I worked, this form emerged, with a strength and presence that encouraged me. I titled it, "Mercy" because the painting reminded me that when we feel at the end of ourselves, we can still be surprised by receiving a gift we do not deserve, or being saved from what we most fear. This painting was that gift to me.

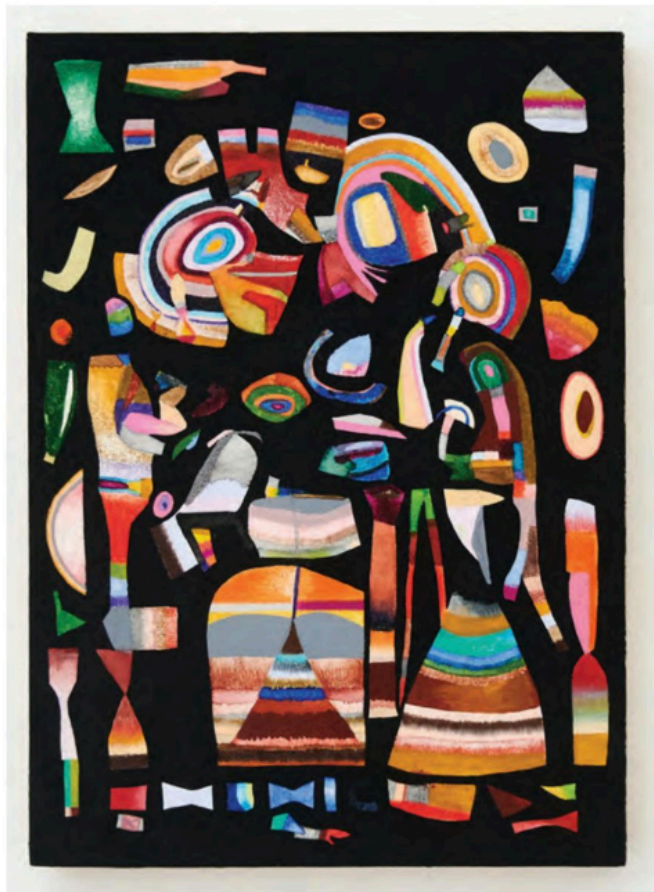
Many of your small works attract me because

you have taken the white space and given it the same importance as the sculptural forms you have created in the space. How do you do this?

SH: Thank you for acknowledging the use of white in the paintings and giving it equal value to the sculptural forms. To be honest, for many years I struggled with this white space. I worried that I was not utilizing the entire rectangle, or that the figures were not integrated, seeming to "float". However, over time, I have come to embrace this aspect of my work. In part I believe the use of white has to do with the sculptural nature of my painting, it provides a place of rest, pause and accompaniment to the centralized forms. In a similar way that you would encounter a sculpture, either displayed on a white pedestal, or surrounded by



"Mercy" Small Works No. 122
7"x 5" Mixed media on paper, mounted on wood panel 2022



"Untitled" Small Collections No. 13
7"x 5" Mixed media on paper, mounted on wood panel 2022

the white walls of a gallery. And yet, because they are paintings, the white space does more formally than act as a backdrop for the forms, it becomes a form itself. It's important to note that I paint the backgrounds after I create the sculptural forms. I treat every inch of the painting with a very small brush, laying in white acrylic to enclose and seal the world of the form. I give equal value and attention to the white space as I do the forms through this process of care.

I have experimented with different colored backgrounds in the past, and with extending the sculptural forms to the edge of the rectangle. Most recently, I have used black paint instead of white to enclose the forms. I do seem to always come back to white.

What do you find most interesting, necessary and relevant in your life that needs to be made into art? To be made permanent, to add to our busy, changing world, and above all, to help you see how and why things work, or, don't work?

SH: The act of creating is a profound gift, both to the artist and the world that receives it. Perhaps, this is true of any generative act, but the non-utilitarian arts provide something very special to the world. A moment to pause and contemplate the wonder of our existence, the deepest longings and expressions of our shared humanity, to experience beauty that transcends culture and is felt in the

heart instantly — this is the essence of what makes all artmaking significant to me.

To make images and objects that inspire and provide opportunities for these types of contemplative, emotional and spiritual moments to occur seem necessary and valuable to me. Apart from these big picture motivations for making art, on a very humble and personal level, painting brings me joy. It is a sacred place to rest, to play, to weep and feel the pain and hope of life, to make something new that has never existed in the world before, that only I can make. It is the experience of loving deeply and being deeply loved. When I paint I feel immense pleasure, a gratitude for making, an awareness of the privilege it is to paint, to make art and share it with the world.

Sasha, do you get motivated or inspired by the art your children create? If so, what happens between you and them that add more dimension and meaning to your art, and, what do you see happen to them when they are inspired by your art?

SH: Yes! I am continually amazed at the art of my children, but in different ways. My oldest son has significant disabilities and is limited in his fine motor abilities, so his art is much different than my youngest son.

I think what I notice in both of their art making is their use of space. Their compositions are so intuitive, where they choose to put figures and ob-

jects relative to the rectangle is spectacular.

I have never put pressure on my kids to make art, and I have always tried to encourage them to draw and paint with freedom. I hope when they visit my studio and see my paintings they are connecting creativity with their dad and seeing art making as a valuable contribution to the world.

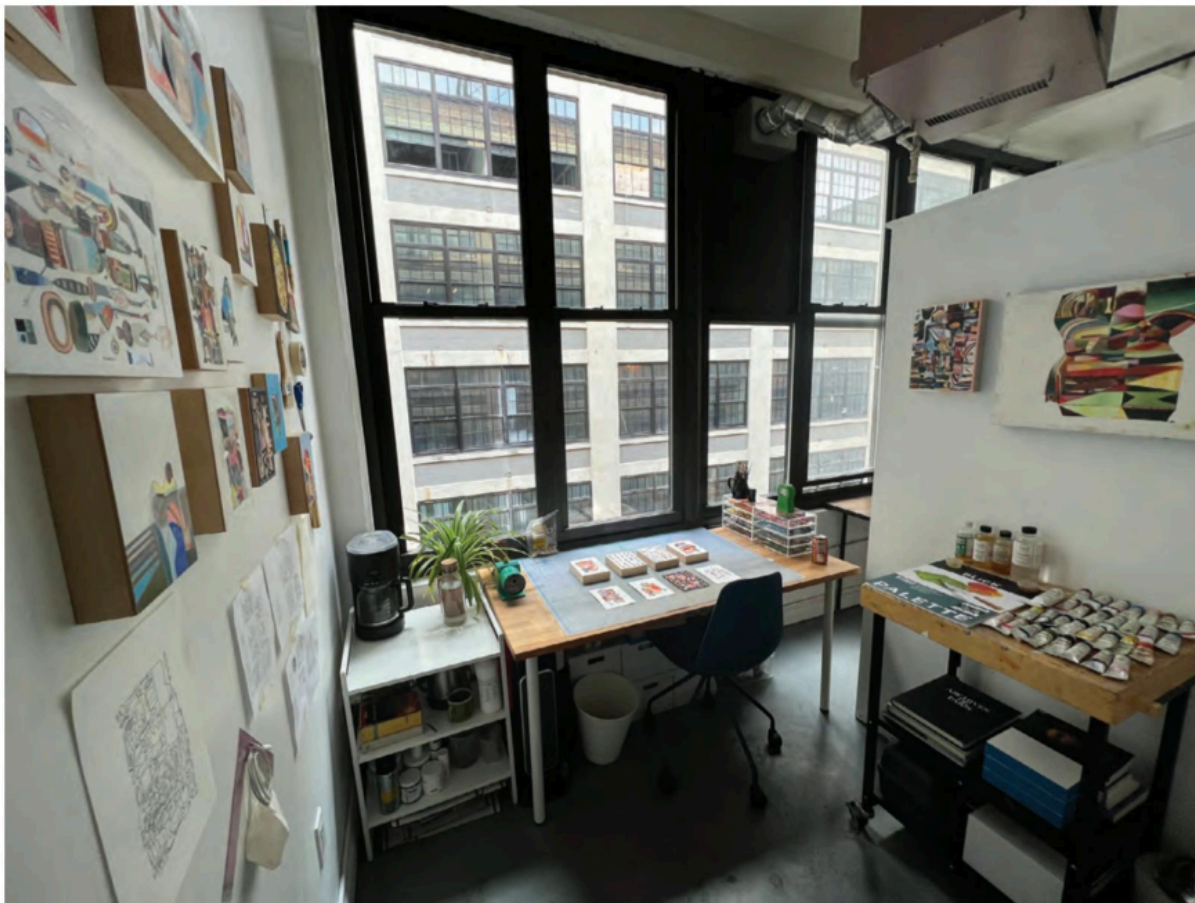
Painting is a form of sophisticated play for me, which was my introduction to art making as a child. In this way, my children remind me of the simplicity and joy of painting.

Do the icons have any specific names or meanings or hidden spiritual truths to them, or are they spontaneously derived from somewhere cosmic or subconscious? Are some often repeated in different canvases at different times in your art making? (Thank you for putting your thought process into words)

SH: I really appreciate your interpretation of my paintings as "icons". I actually think that is an appropriate way to think about them. Historically, icon paintings tended to be small, often portraits, painted on wood in bright colors for the purpose of religious contemplation and devotion.

In a similar way, each of my paintings has a unique essence, or personality that accompanies the work in the world. It causes me to wonder about an image or object's ability to contain or preserve the spirit they were created in. In a sense

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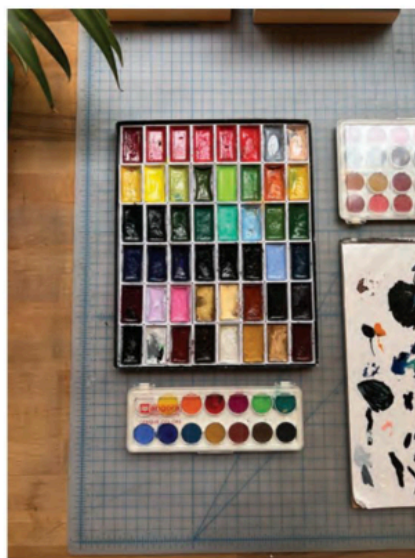
Sasha Hallock Studio, works in progress, 2022

the works are an extension of myself, my life experience, sorrow and joys, my faith, hope and prayer poured into their creation, where the works go, a very real part of me goes with them.

My forms come into being spontaneously for the most part. My process involves intuitive building and reacting to each preceding mark, color and shape in order to construct the forms.

I find that I am drawn to the forms of physical structures, monuments and statues, buildings, and dwelling places. The permeance and presence a structure has in the world takes on a personification, a real presence in relationship to its surroundings. Many titles also include themes of protection, like "Sentries," and "Guarding the Tree of Life". I'm fascinated by ancient stone statues, monuments, and totems. Their sense of personality and presence is very much in line with my work.

Many forms, patterns and shapes are repeated in the paintings, almost like building materials or architectural features. They are recognizable and distinct to my design aesthetic and constitute a formal language that has developed over many years. This language is informed by my lived experience in the world, particularly in New York. I



*Japanese and German watercolors,
Sasha Hallock's studio, Brooklyn, NY
Photographs on this page by Sasha Hallock*

take notice of textures and relationships in the physical world, storing these tactile and aesthetic experiences.

I find it very interesting that you mentioned that people have often commented that the work is at first similar and then upon closer examination, foreign or a bit strange, or otherworldly. What is your reaction to this?

SH: I love it! I am simultaneously enthralled by history and the past, and science fiction and the future. Both of these genres seem to evoke the mysterious, the foreign, the recognizable, but distinctly different. Perhaps the through line is the humanity present in both the past and future. This connects in some ways to spirituality as well—this otherworldly/ supernatural/ familiar yet foreignness of the divine. And so my paintings evoke a sense of the past (archeological, simplistic, statues/ stonework, totems/ monuments) and the future (geometric, futuristic architecture).

Tell us about your studio space, Sasha. The heart of it all. Or, is it?

SH: My studio is on the fourth floor of a long



Sasha Hallock "Close" 20" x 16" Oil on Wood Panel 2022

dominant factory near the Brooklyn Navy Yard in Clinton Hill. It is a very small space in the corner of a loft that is subdivided into ten studios. I have a row of seven foot windows that face west and look across an alley towards another old factory building that is currently being turned into a hotel/spa.

Many visitors have commented that my studio feels like an extension of my paintings. It is orderly and clean. I have a plant, and a coffee maker, my supplies are arranged on a small white shelf and underneath my desk in boxes and drawers. It is a privilege to have the space. It's the first studio I've had that is within walking distance to my home, which has been really nice. Home, studio, church, the park, my son's school, grocery shopping, and the city pool, are all within a two mile section of Brooklyn that I call home. My studio feels like sacred space. It is a place of respite and prayer, a place of concentration, tears and hard work. It is a place to reflect and host other artists.

As a child, what inspired you to become an artist? What was your childhood all about?

SH: From an early age making art was central to

my life. Looking back now, I believe drawing was both a form of play (as it is for many children), but also an escape, a way to cope with how helpless I was as a child. I had no control over where I lived or the lack of access that I had to my father, but when I created my drawings, I was safe and could explore and imagine different worlds than the one I was living in.

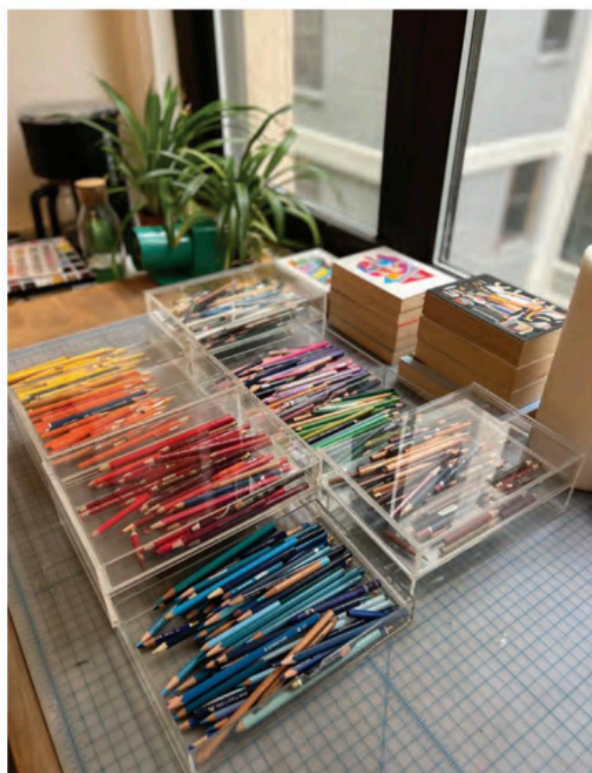
My father is Iranian and my mother is American. They met in Paris in the early 1980s while my mother was studying at the Sorbonne. Unfortunately, their marriage did not last and they divorced a few years after I was born. As a result, I grew up on the northern shore of Cayuga Lake in the Finger Lakes region of New York while my father lived in Manhattan. The loss of my father simultaneously introduced a deep longing and mystery into my life. I felt great wonder at the unknown and a longing for deep connection that was absent with my father.

The land became my companion. I was deeply affected by the beauty of the Finger Lakes Region as a child. I grew up swimming in lakes, walking through fields and woods and was very aware of light, particularly in the summertime. There was a visceral, aesthetic quality to the land that formed

me. As much as nature influenced my visual sense of the world, so too did the city. From an early age, I was captivated by New York City. I would draw the skyline over and over again, inventing buildings and different architectural configurations. The diversity, complexity and density fascinated me. I count it a great privilege to call New York my home and raise my family here today.

And tell us about the non-profit work, called Transform Arts NYC that you are involved with? It is very worthy for us to know about.

SH: Transform Arts NYC is an arts non-profit that works at the intersection of art and religion. We host artist residencies in Brooklyn that combine artistic and professional development with spiritual practices. Along with my team, I help plan and facilitate the residencies and other related programming. Related to this work, I am completing a Master's degree program from City Seminary of New York in Harlem through which I am researching the feasibility of hosting artist residencies in sacred spaces in New York City. My vision is to create subsidized studio spaces for artists who are in desperate need of space to create
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Sasha Hallock's studio, organization of colored pencils



"Untitled" Small Vessels No. 9
7"x5" Mixed media on paper mounted on wood panel, 2022



"Return from Acadia"
12" x 9" Mixed media on paper, mounted on wood panel 2021



"In Between"
7"x5" mixed media on paper, mounted on wood panel, 2022



"Untitled" Small Works No. 119
7"x 5" mixed media on paper mounted on wood panel, 2022



Sasha gives the idea of the size of each painted panel Photograph by Mike Edmonds

their work in the city. I believe the church with its significant property holdings could be a major supporter of artists through the thoughtful and generous stewardship of their physical spaces.

What part of your art process do you find harmonious and what part do you find to be most challenging?

SH: I find that scale is my current challenge. Most of my work is quite small, and this scale provides a sense of intimacy and preciousness that is an important aspect of the work. I am very comfortable making small works, but over the last few years I have tried to develop larger work to explore and challenge myself. Like many artists, it is hard to take something that works small and enlarge it. I am learning that it must become something new, not just a larger version of a smaller work. The scale introduces new variables that inevitably must change the work. Allowing this change to happen can be hard and scary, but I think it is where I must go to grow. I will probably always make small works, but larger works are coming as well.

Finding artists that influence us and that we like can be a very time-consuming affair. But, whether we stumble upon artists we want to follow, or intentionally seek them out, we are influenced and that can change our lives and the way we think. Who has artistically influenced you, and what have they brought into your life?

SH: I find that I list sculptors first. I love the work of Thaddeus Mosely and Isamu Noguchi – their works in wood and stone are masterful. Painting influences include: Contemporary: Pat Adams, Jonas Wood, Makoto Fujimura, Bill Jensen, Carrie Moyer, Kimia Ferdowsi Kline Past: Jan van Eyck, Rembrandt, Kandinsky, Matisse, Stuart Davis. Literary: Kazuo Ishiguro – the way he writes about memory inspires me and connects to my aesthetic of trying to capture a sense of time in my forms.

I am also very interested in ancient art. Persian miniature painting and pottery, jewelry, and sculpture from Egypt, Central and South America, and the Middle East.

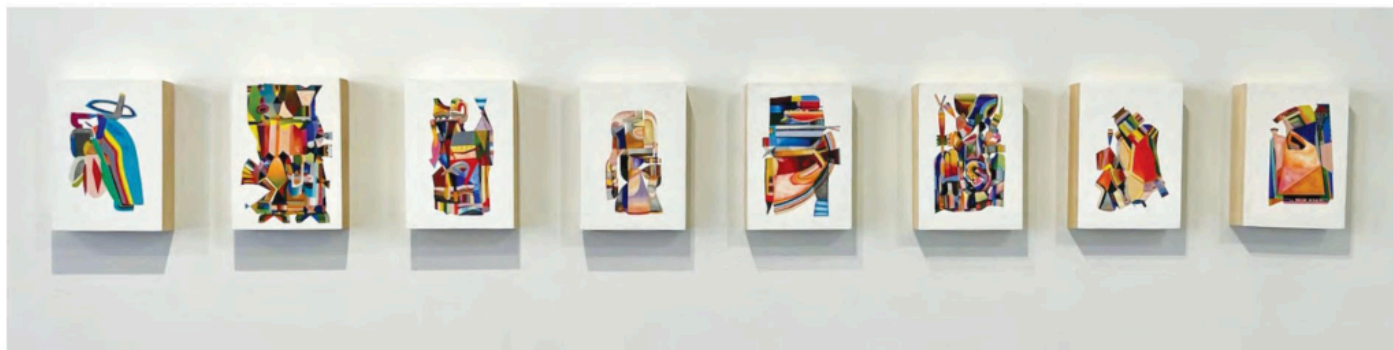
My studio practice is also influenced by a Japanese/ Danish aesthetic of craft and simplicity. I

treat each work with tenderness and care. Each piece of the painting is cared for, treated with attention and consideration. For me, this is not perfectionism, but rather a form of care and respect. From the construction of the forms to the mounting of the paper on the birchwood panels, sanding, laying in the white acrylic background with a 18/0 brush, touch up, and UV varnish—it's hard to articulate, but in a sense this is a form of love, both for the object being made and for its future life in the world.

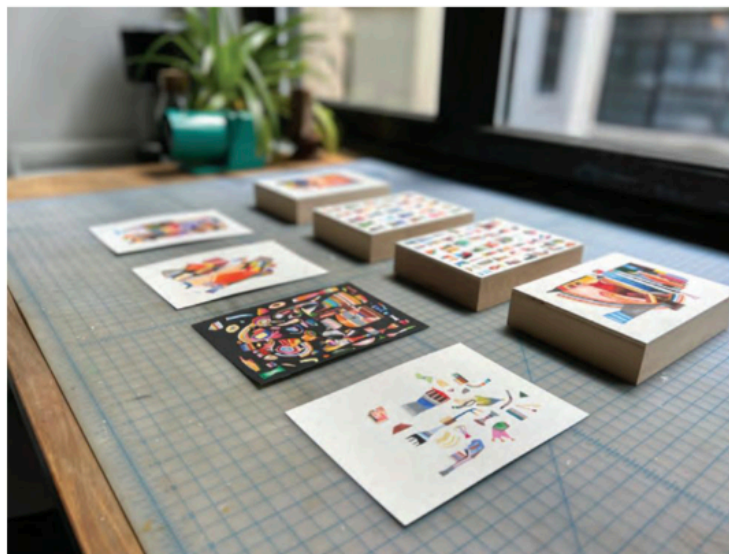
What was your life during the Pandemic, and how has it permanently affected your world?

SH: The pandemic was very difficult for our family. My oldest son Judah was born with a rare genetic condition called "CDG" and as a result he has significant disabilities. He cannot walk or stand independently and needs help for the majority of life skills. He uses a wheel chair for mobility and requires a feeding tube for nutrition. During the pandemic, we lost all support for him as the schools closed. The city did not have a strategy to help care for children like Judah. Remote school

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Installation View: Sasha Hallock, Jigsaw, 2022, SEFA Hudson Courtesy the Artist and Susan Eley Fine Art



Sasha's photograph, a view into his process

ing did not work for him. His school did not return in person until February 2021. I think we are still experiencing the effects of that year—the fatigue, the sadness, and the sense of being alone. Although the pandemic has receded, dealing with the pain, trauma and ongoing grief of caring for my oldest son continues to be part of my life experience. In some ways, my art is an expression of the hope I feel through suffering—this audacious claim that beauty is perhaps all the more needed, a symbol of resilience in the midst of pain.

As an artist, how important is selling your work, and how does the new age we live in opened you up to new ways of selling your work?

SH: It always feels good to see the work appreciated and valued in the world. Looking to sales for validation can be a slippery slope—there is a degree of affirmation when the work sells, but the art market defies formulas and doesn't always reward those who work the hardest or are making great work.

Selling my work is important in the sense that I love seeing people respond and enjoy the work. Each new collector is a relationship and a bond is created through the shared appreciation of the

work. I never take it for granted and I am continually humbled when people decide to invest in my work. I have been surprised by how Instagram and online platforms like 1st Dibs have contributed to sales. Through these platforms the work has sold to collectors in San Francisco, London and Hong Kong.

What humbles you? What motivates you? Can you give us a few lines from a philosophy you follow, something we can learn from, too?

SH: Experiencing suffering humbles me, both my own and when I enter into the suffering of others. I think a lot about grief and loss and I am sensitive to the sorrow and pain in other people's lives. This motivates me to consider the people around me with attention, curiosity and love. One of my favorite passages in the Bible is also the shortest. After the death of Lazarus, it is simply recorded, "Jesus wept". This ability to grieve and empathize is so important. We need more of this kind of compassion for ourselves and our neighbors in the world.

When people go towards trends, some of us go the other way. What around you have you noticed that is trending, and are you a part of any of it?

SH: In painting, figurative work is definitely trending and has been for several years. I think my goal has been to make work that is genuine to me, that only I can make, which has meant staying pretty focused on my current subject matter and direction.

You can follow me on:
Instagram @sashahallock
Website: Sashahallock.com
Gallery: Susan Eley Fine Art

The artist is represented by Susan Eley Fine Art. The Gallery has featured Hallock's works in both its New York City and Hudson locations. The exhibition Jigsaw is on view at SEFA Hudson through September 18, 2022. The show pairs Hallock's detailed mixed media works with encaustics by Amber George. Their abstracted melding of shapes and patterns is a means to render their personal and imagined universes.

Thank you, Sasha!

